

Making the Bible Plain for Plain People

American Translation by Ballantine Clarifies the World's Best Seller

THE Bible is still the best seller in civilized languages, and is to be found translated into more tongues, civilized and barbarous, than any other book in the history of written things. In some languages it remains today the only written specimen; the missionary's conception of the spiritual importance of many tribes having done for them what their commercial, political and ethnological importance has never been sufficient to achieve, namely, given their dialects a vocabulary, grammar and syntax solely to convey to them the enlightenment of Holy Writ.

In these days, however, there have been a number of movements toward a re-translation of the Bible to give it a setting in modern terms. Not all of these have been happy in their results. The Revised Version, while in fairly wide use, is confessedly lacking in the chaste and simple grandeur of the Authorized Version. But just as candidly is it agreed that certain words and sentence forms in the Authorized Version no longer convey to our minds the exact sense of the Original, for the reason that the English words themselves have undergone a change in their value to public speech.

The only attempts along this line which can be regarded as serious are those which go back to the original sources, thus producing a genuine translation and not a mere revision of a previous translation. These have resulted in some very fine editions, especially of the New Testament, by men of devout scholarship. Among the best known translations now in use are The Emphatic Diaglott, by Benjamin Wilson which combines on the same page the Greek text with both literal and linear translation; Rev. Prof. James Moffatt's "A New Translation of the New Testament"; "The Twentieth Century New Testament," based on the Westcott and Hort Greek text; and the Weymouth New Testament.

These are all known for various values, the one common to all being the interpretative light which they throw on the more obscure passages of the Authorized Version.

These, however, are largely efforts of British scholars. There is another modern translation well worth notice in this connection because it is the work of an individual American and has won praise from the critics who are competent to pass on it. This is the translation known as "The American Bible," by Frank Schell Ballantine, the New Testament portion of which is completed and the Old Testament partially done. For a time it was the only strictly American work of special note, although there is now appearing in parts a publication called the "Concordant Version of the Sacred Scriptures" based on the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, with full readings and photographic original text.

Mr. Ballantine was rector of an Episcopal parish in Pennsylvania when he began his work of turning the Scriptures into the speech of the people. Something of the ideal of Tyndale was in his mind, who said he "would make the New Testament so plain that even a plowboy could understand it." He approached his work through the medium of the French translation by Henri Lasserre in his *Les Saintes Evangiles*. Then, going back to the Greek, Mr. Ballantine produced, in five little volumes, the New Testament.

Clarification without vulgarization is the impression made upon the casual reader of The American Bible. He preserves the literary forms which have been made familiar to the American Bible reading public by Professor Moulton's "Modern Readers' Bible." But above all he gives to people unskilled in the ancient languages a clear impression of how unconventional was the original speech of the Book. The New Testament was written in the speech of the plain people, and one risk which a really fresh and true translation runs today is that of having its plainness mistaken for irreverent freedom on the part of the translator. But the translator may be only reproducing in the equivalent of our speech what the New Testament said in the street speech of the first century.

A few excerpts from this translation will serve better than any description can do to give the flavor of it. This from the First of Genesis:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Now the earth was an empty waste;
And darkness was on the surface of the deep;
But the Mind of God was at work on the surface of the waters."

This from the beginning of Mark's Gospel, dealing with the appearance of John the Baptist:

"John the Cleaner came in the wilderness proclaiming the cleaning a change of mind brings by effecting release from misdeeds."

This from the preface of St. Luke's Gospel:
"My Dear Theophilus:

"Many have undertaken to write a narrative of what has happened among us. In doing this they have followed the account of those eyewitnesses and servants of the word from the be-

ginning who delivered them to us. So having traced the course of everything accurately from the first, it seemed good to me also to write you in due order, that you might know the certainty of what you were taught by word of mouth."

In this version the familiar Biblical "Behold!" becomes the plain everyday "Listen!"

The expression "He spake unto them this parable"

sumed that Jesus meant something by each phrase, but neither the Authorized nor the Revised Version gives a clue to what it may be. In The American Bible the italicized clauses read thus: "*What to say and how to talk about it.*" Here we have the two meanings: the passage relates not only to the substance of the message but also to the form of it, and links with the expression of St. Paul, "Hold fast the form of sound words." Also, in the Book of the Revelation, Chapter 22, note the italicized words—"And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. *In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life.*" The Revised Version gives an alternative reading "a tree of life." In ordinary speech that is what it has come to signify, a single wonderful tree. Of course, a tree cannot be in the middle of the street and on either side of the river too, but trees of the same wood can be. Turning to the original the expression "wood of life" is found, and instantly the picture becomes clear. It is the picture of a woods, a grove of healing—an idea not at all incongruous, as all city-dwellers who enter the cool green aisles of an earthly wood well know. Thus we have in The American Bible the reading, as follows:

"And he showed me a river
of living water
Bright as crystal,
Proceeding out of the
Throne of God and
the Lamb

*In the middle of the street.
And on this side of the river
and on that*

*Was the Wood of Life
Bearing twelve kinds of
fruits,
Yielding its fruit every
month:*

"And the leaves of the Wood
Were for the healing of the Nations."

A further example of clarity without any sacrifice of the form which has become classic is timely for the Easter season. It is St. Paul's discussion of the resurrection of the dead as found in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians:

"But some one will say: How are the dead going to be raised?

And with what kind of a body are they going to come?

You foolish fellow!

What you, yourself, sow does not spring into life, unless it dies.

And what you sow, is not the future body,
But bare grain,

It may be of wheat,

Or of some other kind.

But God gives it a body just as he sees fit,

And to each of the seeds its own body.

Not every kind of flesh is the same.

But there is one kind peculiar to men.

Another peculiar to beasts,

Another to birds,

Another to fishes.

There are also bodies peculiar to the heavens,

And bodies peculiar to the earth.

But the brightness of the heavenly bodies is one thing,

And that of the earthly bodies another.

The sun has its brightness,

The moon has its,

The stars have theirs.

For star differs from star in brightness.

It is the same, also, with the resurrection of the dead.

It is sown in a state of corruption.

It is raised in a state of incorruption.

It is sown in an offensive condition.

It is raised in a condition of preeminent dignity.

It is sown in a state of weakness.

It is raised in a state of power.

It is sown a natural body.

It is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body,

There is also a spiritual body.

And so it is written:

The first man, Adam, became a living soul.

The last Adam, a life-giving spirit.

Yet the spiritual is not first,

But the natural, and then the spiritual.

The first man is from the earth, and made of earth.

The second man is from heaven.

As is he who is made of earth,

Such are those also who are made of earth.

And as is he who is of heavenly origin,

Such are those also who are of heavenly origin.

And as we have borne the image of him who is made of earth,

We shall also bear the image of him who is of heavenly origin."



FRANK SCHELL BALLANTINE, an Episcopal clergyman and war chaplain who has worked for years to produce a modern version of the New Testament in accord with the original. Mr. Ballantine also works with his hands, as his portrait in carpenter's attire indicates.

becomes the plain "He gave them this illustration."

The term "tribute money" becomes in plain English "the two-dollar Temple tax."

There are certain clarifications of assistance to the careful reader of the Bible, such as that found in translating John 12:49 where Christ is reported as saying, "For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment *what I should say and what I should speak.*"

The italicized words are redundant. They seem to repeat the same idea. The idea of redundancy is not compatible with any but the literary view of Scripture, which is admittedly an inadequate view. It is as-

The Good Samaritan

A LAWYER came forward and put him fully to the test, and said:

"Teacher, what shall I do to gain eternal life?"

"What is written in the law? How do you read it?"

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God

With all thy heart,

With all thy soul,

With all thy strength,

With all thy mind;

And thy neighbor as thyself."

"You are right. Do this and you will live."

But wishing to vindicate himself he said to Jesus:

"Who is my neighbor?"

"A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among robbers, who stripped him of everything, beat him, and went off leaving him half dead. Now a priest happened to be going down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. In the same way a Levite also came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

"But a Samaritan traveler came to him, and when he saw him he took pity on him and came and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he threw out two dollars and gave them to the inn-keeper, and said: 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend I will repay you when I come back.'

"Which of the three do you think was neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"

"He who took pity on him."

"Go and do the same." —Luke 10.